

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 129

Program: N/A

Division/Agency: (ARTC) Australian Rail Track Corporation

Topic: Fire Hazard on the main Southern Line, NSW

Proof Hansard Page/s: 46 (18/11/2013)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Mr Fullerton: We work in with all the authorities. We have 8 ½ thousand kilometres of track, and we have conversations with the fire authorities, the SES. Recently in New South Wales, when the fire cut our line south of Sydney, we worked with those people to close the trains and get access to the corridor. If there are particular areas that you have a concern about, I am more than happy to—

CHAIR: The main southern line, I am talking about. The last time our district got burnt out—I used to be the fire controller in our area—I went to the fire, and they said, 'Don't worry, Senator; there are five category so-and-so trucks there.' I drove into town and thought,

....

You guys want to get fair dinkum. It is a disgrace, and it worries every farmer every time we drive up the bloody line. It is the biggest fire hazard besides some of the roads where they are worried about eating the grass and the fuel load down, and you wonder why the Blue Mountains get burnt out when they will not reduce the fuel load. You want to burn the line—this is you fellows—in August before the spring? That is what you wanted to do last year. It is crap.

Mr Fullerton: I am happy to take that on notice and go back and review it.

Answer:

Whilst many years ago it was common practice for rail authorities to cooperate with local fire brigades to brace railway lines prior to summer, this practice was discontinued many years ago and ARTC, since taking up the NSW lease in 2004, have not engaged in this activity.

We understand the practice was stopped because of the impact on native vegetation & potential air pollution. It was practiced mostly in the steam era when there was a high risk of trains starting fires.

ARTC uses chemical controls and slashing to control vegetation on its corridor.

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 130

Program: N/A

Division/Agency: (ARTC) Australian Rail Track Corporation

Topic: Fire Reduction and Supervision

Proof Hansard Page/s: 48 (18/11/2013)

Senator Heffernan asked:

CHAIR: On notice, could you provide to the committee all the regulatory requirements and legal obligations that ARTC has in relation to the corridor with regard to fire reduction risk and supervision? You would not honestly expect any ordinary Australian to believe that slashing anything is a firebreak, would you? I would be interested to see what you are obliged to do and how sensible those obligations are. Thank you very much.

Answer:

Because ARTC operates in five states the requirements vary between all jurisdictions.

ARTC complies with all of the requirements imposed on it and tactical activities include vegetation control by slashing or chemical control; the use of the track itself and its drainage and access roads as a firebreak; and slashing where appropriate.

These activities are balanced against other legislative requirements related to preservation of endangered species of vegetation.

We have a good working relationship at local level with firefighting agencies and we provide support and access wherever requested.

We also comply with all bans and limitations imposed by fire authorities including obtaining hot work permits for certain maintenance activities during the fire season.